
4.3 AESTHETICS

INTRODUCTION

Because aesthetic value can be found in scenic qualities of both natural and urbanized environments, any discussion of the aesthetic impacts caused by development is, by nature, subjective. This section of the EIR describes the existing aesthetic values of the project area and assesses the potential aesthetic impacts that could result from development of the Vista Oaks and Highlands Parcel A project sites. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) describes the concept of aesthetic resources in terms of scenic vistas, scenic resources (such as trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings along a state scenic highway), and the existing visual character or quality of the project site.

G.C. Wallace of California, Inc. performed a photosimulation of the proposed Vista Oaks project site. The photosimulation includes two sets of photographs of the Vista Oaks project site from four separate locations. The photos generated by G.C. Wallace are provided in this chapter. The first set of photos is of the existing condition of the project site prior to development. The second set of photos are identical to the first, except that they include superimposed computer-generated images of the changes that would occur at each of the locations as a result of the development of the proposed project.

Other sources cited include the City of Rocklin General Plan (1991) and the City of Rocklin General Plan EIR (1990). A site survey was also conducted by members of Raney Planning & Management, Inc. in February 2003 and May 2005. Pertinent comments received in response to the Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the proposed projects have been integrated into the analysis.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Vista Oaks and Highlands Parcel A

The project sites are located within the City of Rocklin, which is within Placer County and is situated in an area of transition from the Sierra Nevada foothills to the expanses of the Central Valley. Typically, the region is characterized by grasslands, rolling hills, graded slopes, and woodlands.

The approximately 93-acre Vista Oaks project site is located directly to the east and northeast of the Interstate 80/State Route 65 interchange in Rocklin, while the approximately 30-acre Highlands Parcel A site is located directly to the east of the Vista Oaks site. The project sites are visible to people traveling on I-80 and a portion of the SR 65 overpass. Secret Ravine Creek runs through the project sites from east to west. The

two sites are currently characterized by grassland and oak woodland on the sloped hillsides and creek bottomlands, as well as riparian woodland along the Secret Ravine Creek corridor. Nearly level terrain exists on the project sites to the north and south of Secret Ravine Creek, while the steepest terrain on both sites is located south of the creek.

The project sites are surrounded by proposed, approved, and existing residential developments. Neither site is “pristine” in that for many years they have been traversed by off-road vehicles resulting in environmental damage typical of that activity. Please refer to the discussion of surrounding land uses in Chapter 4.2 of this Draft EIR (Land Use) for descriptions of these subdivisions. See Figure 4.7-1 of the Draft EIR (Circulation Map) for locations of these developments.

REGULATORY CONTEXT

Local

City of Rocklin General Plan

The following include the existing policies, laws, and regulations established in the 1991 City of Rocklin General Plan, as applicable to the proposed project:

Land Use Element

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| Policy 7 | To require that new development in or near existing residential areas be compatible with those existing neighborhoods. |
| Policy 8 | To coordinate planning in areas contiguous to neighboring jurisdictions in order to ensure compatible land uses. |

Open Space, Conservation and Recreation Element

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| Policy 1 | To encourage the protection of natural resource areas, scenic areas, hilltops, open space areas, and parks from encroachment or destruction by incompatible development through the use of conservation easements, buffers, setbacks, or other measures. Developers shall be required to provide usable land areas outside of conservation easements or established natural resource buffers. |
| Policy 3 | To encourage the protection of historically significant and geologically unique areas and encourage their preservation. |
| Policy 4 | To encourage the protection of oak trees, including heritage oaks, and other significant vegetation from destruction. |
| Policy 20 | To consider development projects in terms of their visual qualities and compatibility with surrounding areas, especially those urbanizing areas abutting rural or semi-rural areas. |

The General Plan EIR found that visual impacts associated with General Plan buildout could not be reduced to less-than-significant. However, the General Plan EIR identified and recommended the following policy be added to the Open Space, Conservation and Recreation element to provide emphasis to the consideration of visual amenities: “To consider development projects in terms of their visual qualities and compatibility with

surrounding areas, especially those urbanizing areas abutting rural or semi-rural areas” (Policy 20).

Southeast Rocklin Circulation Element

The following Southeast Rocklin Circulation Element policies are applicable to the aesthetics issues associated with the proposed project:

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| Objective 3 | To minimize the impact to the character of the existing neighborhoods as a consequence of the installation of road improvements in the area. |
| Policy 7 | Design road improvements and new alignments to avoid to preserve the existing neighborhood character. |
| Policy 37 | Replace oak trees with a diameter of six (6) inches or more, which are removed as a result of road construction, in-kind, at a 2 : 1 (replaced : removed) ratio or greater, in areas adjacent to the roadway. Plantings are to be installed by a qualified landscape contractor using proven methods to protect saplings from depredation and facilitate survival. Size of new trees shall be specified by the City Council. |
| Policy 38 | Prior to final sites of new alignments, inventory all oak trees within 500 feet of the proposed road alignments. Trees greater than six inches in diameter at 4-1/2' from ground level will be identified, marked, and mapped. Healthy oak trees with greater than 100 inch circumference, measured four and one half feet above ground level will be identified as “heritage” oaks. The inventory will be used as a factor in the selection of alignments which minimize impacts to the more valued oak trees, while still meeting the engineering requirements of siting the alignments. |

IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

This section provides the standards of significance and method of analysis used to determine aesthetic impacts.

Standards of Significance

For the purposes of this EIR, an impact to aesthetic resources would be considered significant if the proposed project would:

- Substantially alter or degrade the visual character or quality of the project site; or
- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista; or
- Substantially increase light or glare in the project site or vicinity, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views.

Method of Analysis

Vista Oaks

G.C. Wallace of California, Inc. performed photosimulations of the proposed Vista Oaks project site. The photosimulations includes two sets of photographs of the project site from four separate locations that were determined by City of Rocklin staff and G.C. Wallace staff. The first set of photos is of the existing condition of the project site prior to development. The second set of photos are identical to the first, except that they include superimposed computer-generated images of the changes that would occur at each of the locations as a result of the development of the proposed project. Each of the four locations is identified on a map, included as Figure 4.3-1. However, it should be noted that the photosimulations' computer-generated models did not include surrounding future development, such as the approved Highlands project, the Roseville Vista Oaks project, or the approved Stoneridge project (each described in Chapter 4.2, page 2, in greater detail).

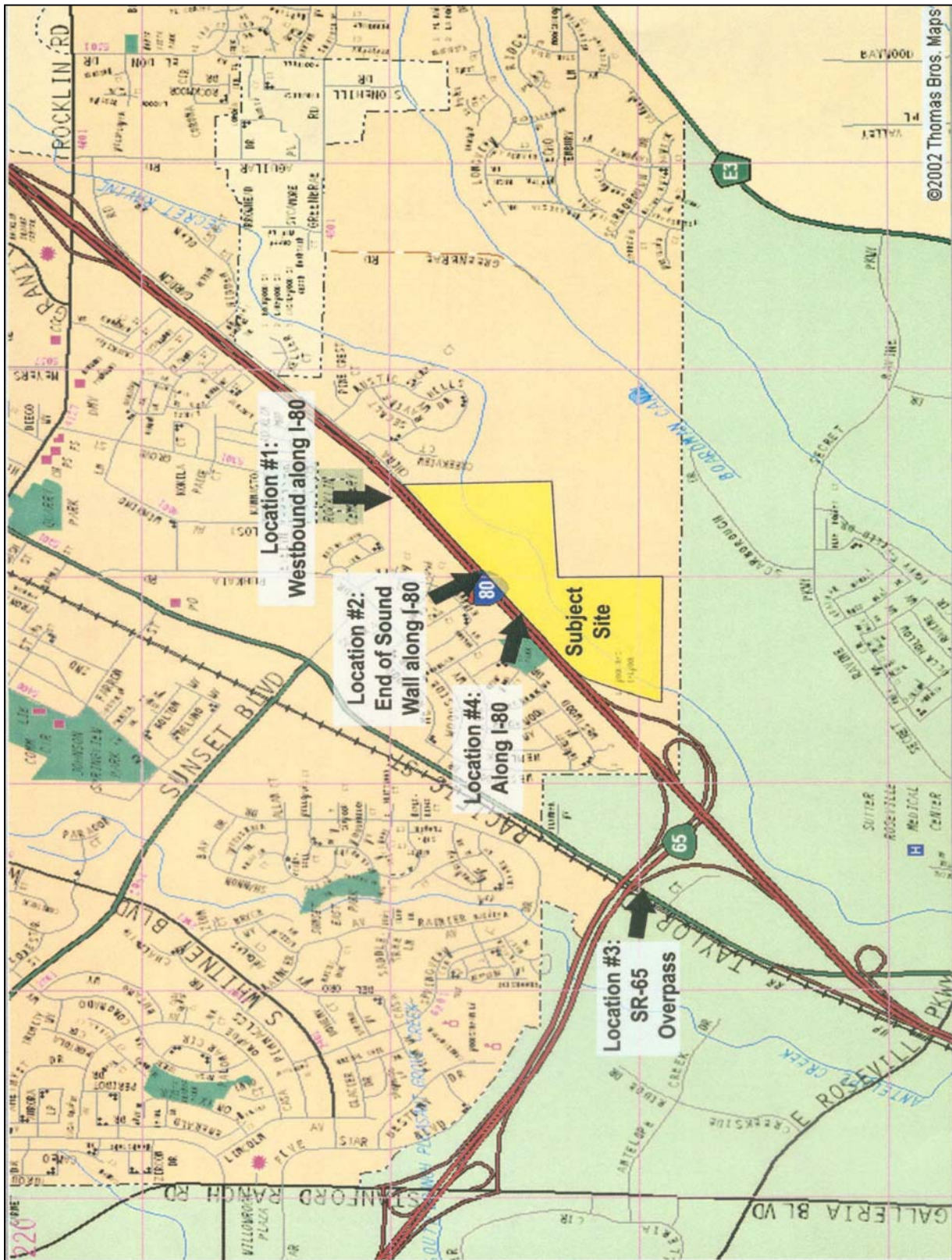
In order to assess which locations in the project site vicinity would be most appropriate for photosimulation, staff from G.C. Wallace of California, Inc., along with staff from the City of Rocklin, physically inspected the vicinity. The criteria involved in the location decision were based upon the level of aesthetic impact that the proposed project would potentially have at locations viewed by the general public. The photos are intended to provide representative views of the project site as a whole. Two issues should be noted: the photographs were taken in springtime with a full canopy of deciduous vegetation that would not typically be in place during winter and fall months; and 2) the photosimulations do not include tree removal associated with future homes and subdivision streets. The four locations are described below:

- Location 1 is located adjacent to westbound I-80 across from the northern point of the project site. The view from Location 1 looks south onto the project site from the north.
- Location 2 is located adjacent to eastbound I-80 where the end of the sound wall, included as part of the proposed project, would be located. Location 2 views the central portion of the project site from the northeast.
- Location 3 is located on the I-80 onramp of the State Route 65 overpass and views the southwestern portion of the project site from the east.
- Location 4 is located adjacent to eastbound I-80, further west than Location 2, and looks onto the central portion of the project site from the east.

Highlands Parcel A

Photosimulations were not performed for the Highlands Parcel A project site; however, the Highlands Parcel A project site is not adjacent to Interstate 80 as the Vista Oak site is.

Figure 4.3-1
Photosimulation Locations Map



Project-Specific Impacts and Mitigation Measures

4.3I-1 Alteration or degradation of the visual character and quality of the area.

Views from Interstate 80 and northwest of Interstate 80

As noted previously, the most visible public views of the project sites are from the northern side of the project sites along Interstate 80 and from other perspectives located northwest of Interstate 80. To best represent this public “viewshed,” four photosimulations of representative views from this perspective were created (See Figure 4.3-1 for photosimulation locations). The representative views are primarily seen by motorists on Interstate 80 as they drive past the project site. Although Interstate 80 motorists would likely notice a change in the project area viewsheds as a result of the proposed project, such a change would not significantly alter the visual character or quality of the area surrounding the project site. The majority, if not all, of the motorists traveling along Interstate 80 are on their way to a known destination and are not traveling to specifically view the project site, which is not listed as a scenic resource in the City General Plan. Thus, development of the site would represent a continuation of planned urbanization adjacent to the freeway as already experienced by motorists traveling along Interstate 80 and other freeways and highways in the region. In addition, because motorists would experience a small window of visibility of the project site due to high travel speeds in the highway corridor, anticipated changes made to the viewing experience of motorists by the proposed projects are not considered substantially adverse.

The photo represented in Figure 4.3-2 shows the current condition of the project site as seen from areas represented by Location 1. The sound wall present in Figure 4.3-2 is associated with the Rustic Hills subdivision, located adjacent to the Vista Oaks project site. As can be seen, the natural vegetation of the Vista Oaks project site, including trees, is fully visible where the existing sound wall ends. The photosimulation, represented in Figure 4.3-3 shows the same view, but, using a computer-generated model, illustrates that the sound wall of the proposed Vista Oaks project would tie into the existing sound wall. The resultant extended sound wall would partially block views of the natural vegetation and the lower portions of taller trees on the project site that are currently visible under existing conditions at this location. It should be noted that the development of the proposed project with streets and future residences would result in the removal of some trees currently visible from Location 1; therefore, some of the trees visible in both Figures 4.3-2 and 4.3-3 would not exist after development of the project.

Because of the height of the proposed sound wall (14 feet), residences constructed as part of the Phase I portion of the Vista Oaks project would not be visible from Location 1 (see Figure 4.3-4, Vista Oaks Landscape and Sound Wall Details, and Figure 4.3-5, Cross-Section of Views from I-80). Residences resulting from the construction of Phases 2 and 3 would not be readily visible from Location 1 due to screening provided by existing vegetation and topography differences. As noted previously, the installation of a sound wall along Interstate 80 in association with the proposed project would represent a continuation of urbanization adjacent to the freeway that is typical in the region and would not be considered to be a substantial change to the viewshed. In addition, the Highlands Parcel A project site is not visible from Location 1 because it is located south of the Rustic Hills subdivision (which blocks views of the Highlands Parcel A site from I-80), and southeast of the Vista Oaks project site (which would also obstruct views from I-80 to the Highlands Parcel A site).

The photo represented in Figure 4.3-6 shows the current condition of the project site as seen from areas represented by Location 2. The photosimulation represented in Figure 4.3-7 shows the same view, but using a computer-generated model, illustrates one end of the sound wall of the proposed Vista Oaks project. The sound wall would partially block views of the natural vegetation and the lower portions of taller trees on the project site that are currently visible under existing conditions at this location. It should be noted that the development of the proposed project with streets and future residences would result in the removal of some trees currently visible from Location 2. Development of the proposed project would require removal of some of the trees visible in Figures 4.3-6 and 4.3-7. Because of the height of the proposed sound wall (14 feet), residences constructed as part of the Phase 1 portion of the Vista Oaks project would not be visible from Location 2 (see Figure 4.3-5, Cross-Section of Views from I-80). Residences resulting from the construction of Phases 2 and 3 would not be readily visible from Location 2 due to screening provided by existing vegetation and topography differences. As noted previously, the installation of a sound wall along Interstate 80, in association with the proposed project, would represent a continuation of planned urbanization adjacent to the freeway that is typical in the region and would not substantially change the viewshed. In addition, the Highlands Parcel A site is not visible from Location 2 because the views are obstructed by the trees adjacent to I-80 and would be further obstructed by Phase 2 residences within the Vista Oaks project site.

Figure 4.3-8, Location of Project Site Boundary and City Limits within Location 3 View, illustrates the project site boundaries as compared to the surrounding landscape and the Rocklin/Roseville city limits. Views from perspectives located northwest of Interstate 80 (as represented in Locations 3 and 4) would be less blocked by the existing and proposed sound wall, and residences in Phases 2 and 3 of the Vista Oaks project would become more

visible as distance and elevation from the project site increased, as shown by Figures 4.3-9 and 4.3-10. It should be noted that the scale of residences decreases as the distance away from the residences increases. Views of Phase 1 residences would be blocked from other perspectives located northwest of Interstate 80 by the existing and proposed 14-foot tall sound wall (see Figure 4.3- 5, Cross-Section of Views from I-80). Proposed residences associated with the Vista Oaks project would also be homogenous to residences that exist and are planned for in the project vicinity. In addition, the Highlands Parcel A project site would not be highly visible from Location 3 because development from the Highlands project to the south and southwest, as well as Phase 2 of the Vista Oaks project site, would obstruct views of the Highlands Parcel A site. Furthermore, the Highlands Parcel A project would consist of development of the same type and at a lower intensity than surrounding development, so any views of the Highlands Parcel A site from Location 3 would not be substantially altered by development of the proposed project. Views of Highlands Parcel A from Location 4 would be obstructed by trees adjacent to I-80 as discussed above.

The proposed project area is not recognized or recorded as having scenic vistas or viewsheds. In addition, the proposed sound walls would not cause a substantially adverse visual impact because sound walls currently exist in the vicinity of the project site, and new sound walls would be designed to be consistent with the existing wall to contribute to the continuity of the appearance along Interstate 80. Additionally, the change in view would only affect a high-speed travel corridor that is not designated as a scenic highway. New homes on the project sites would also blend with other homes already existing or approved for development in the project vicinity. Finally, much of the project is part of the continuation of planned urbanization of the Rocklin General Plan, and the Rocklin General Plan Update EIR recognized visual impacts associated with buildout of the General Plan as significant and unavoidable, for which the City Council made findings and a statement of overriding consideration.

Although construction of the Vista Oaks and Highlands Parcel A project would change the viewshed of the area, the viewshed would not be changed to a degree that would be considered a substantial alteration or degradation of the visual character or quality of the project site. Therefore, a ***less-than-significant*** impact would result related to degradation of the visual character and quality of the area.

Mitigation Measure(s)

None required.

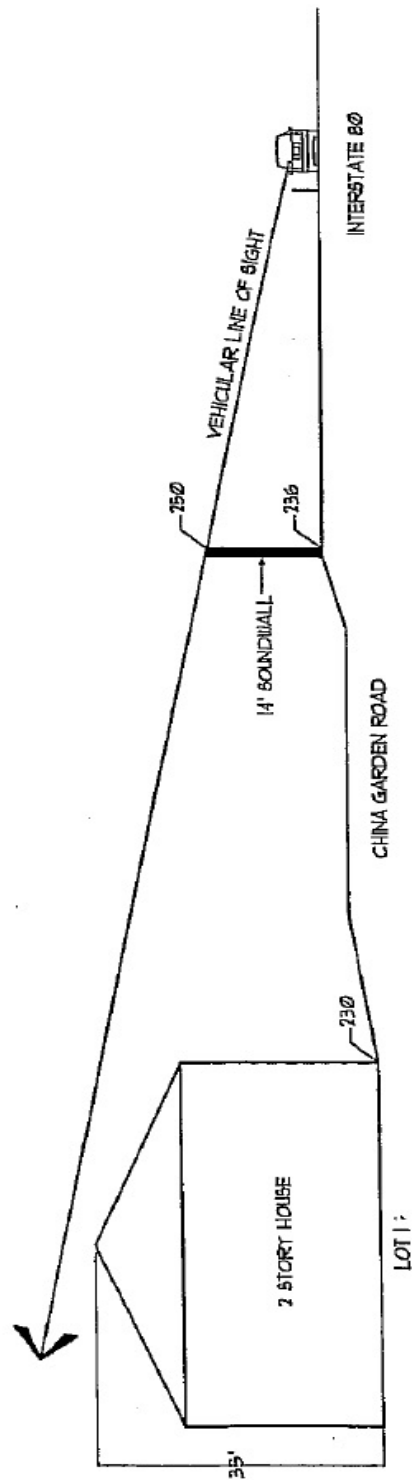
**Figure 4.3-2
Existing View of Project Site from Location 1**



**Figure 4.3-3
Photosimulated View of Project Site from Location 1 after Development of Project**



**Figure 4.3-5
Cross-section**



**Figure 4.3-6
Existing View of Project Site from Location 2**



Figure 4.3-7
Photosimulated View of Project Site from Location 2 after Development of Project



Figure 4.3-8
Location of Project Site Boundary and City Limits within Location 3 view

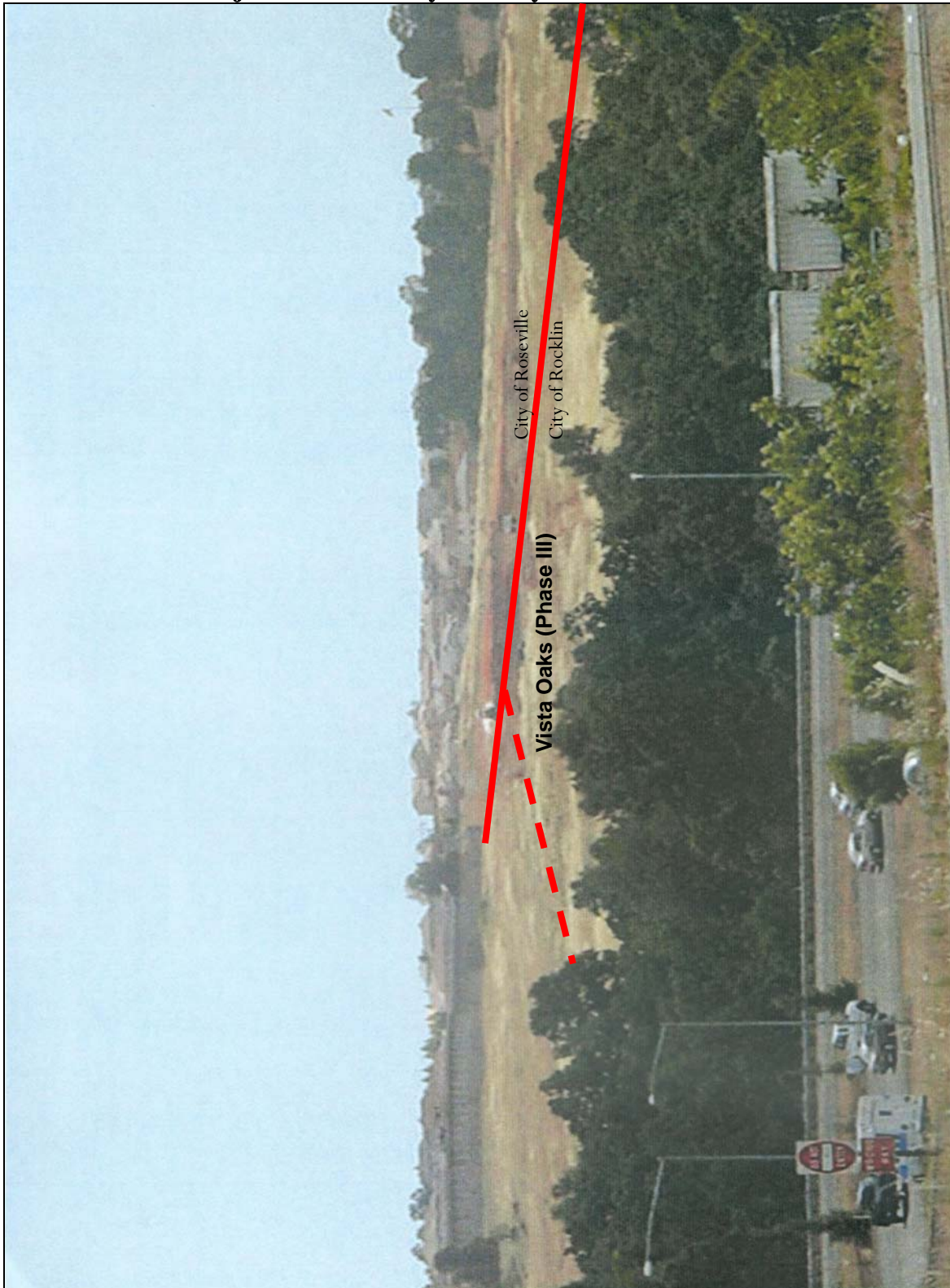
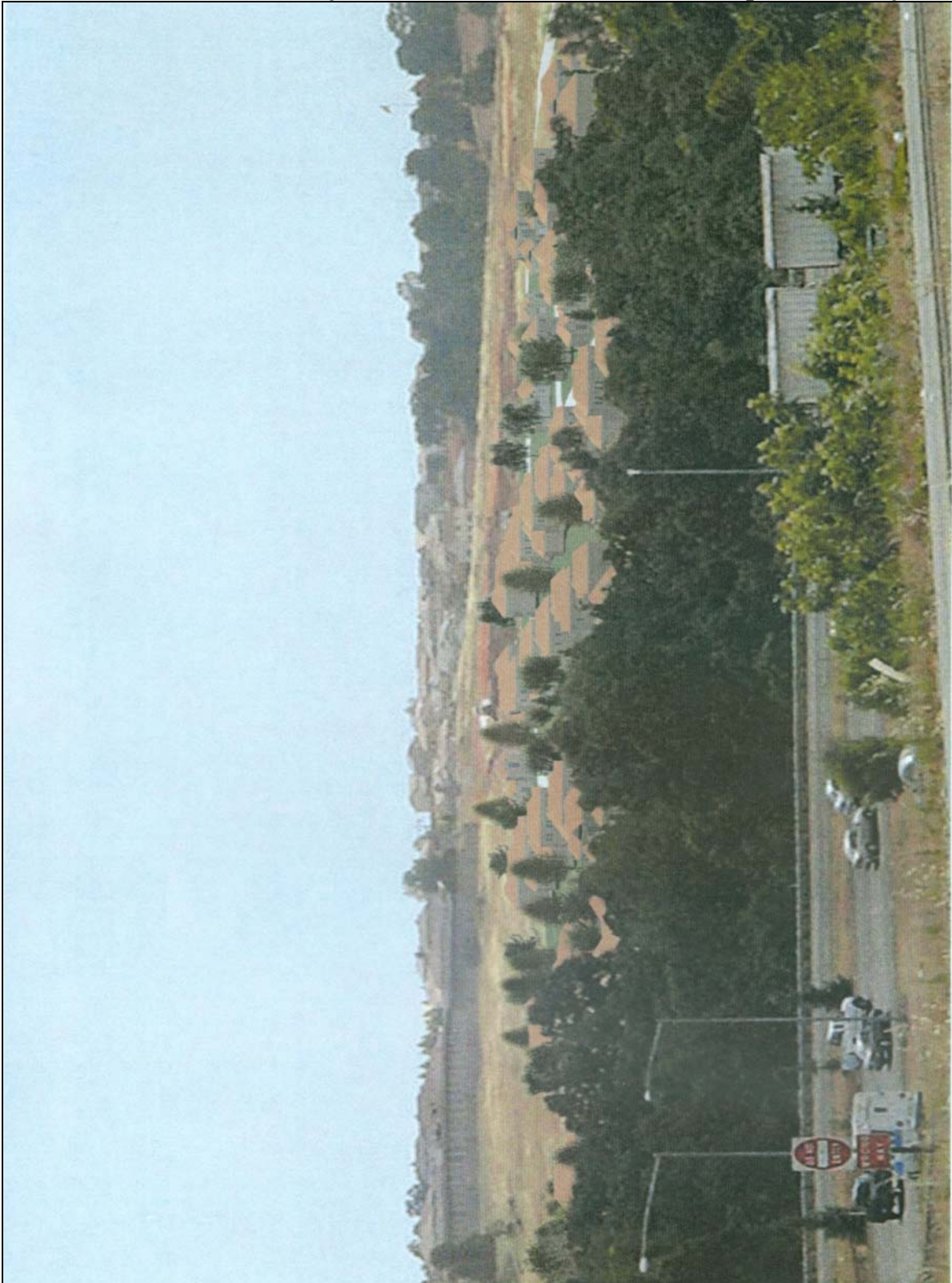


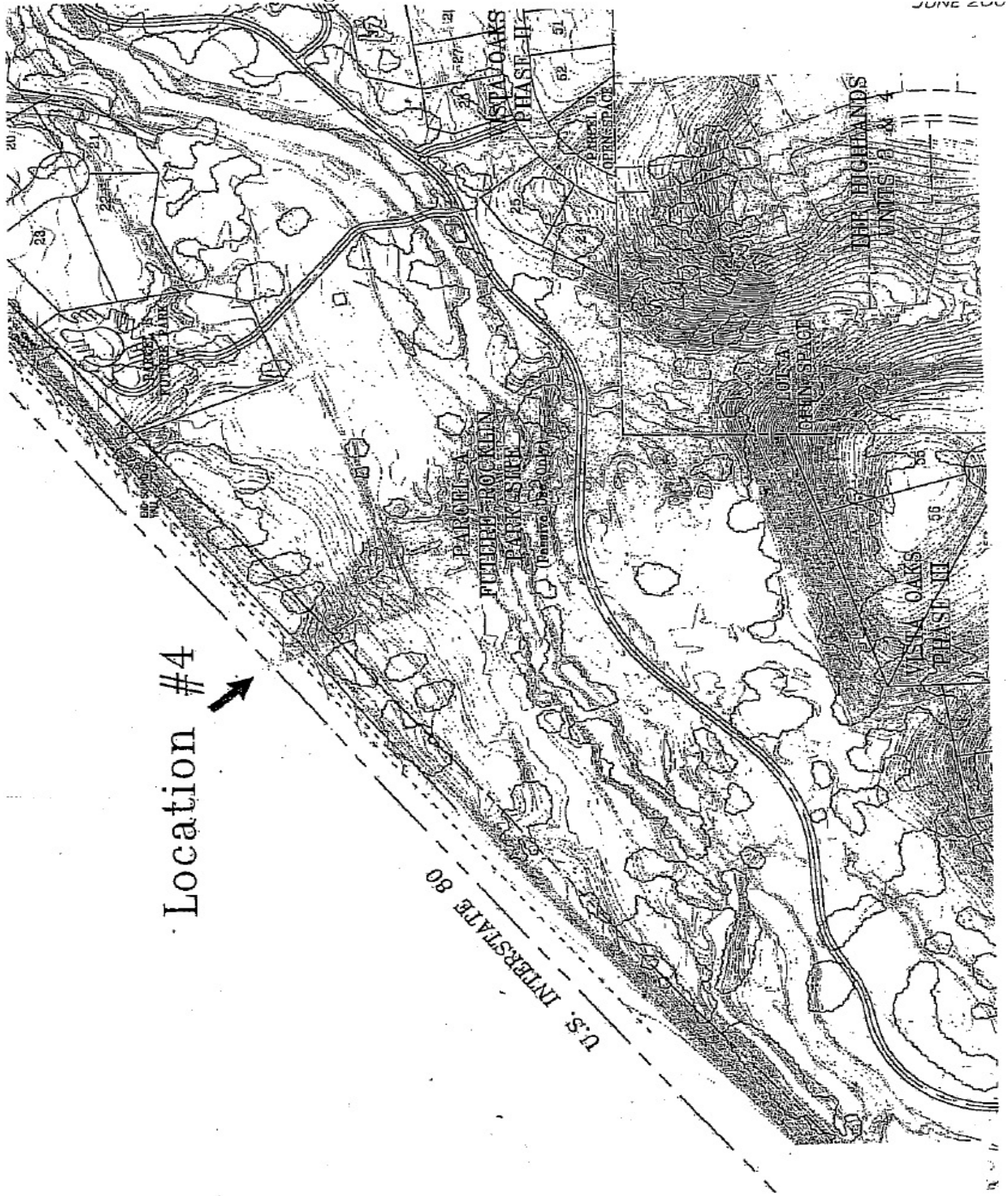
Figure 4.3-9
Photosimulated View of Project Site from Location 3 after Development of Project



**Figure 4.3-10
Existing and Post-project View of Project Site at Location 4
(Development of project would not alter view)**



Figure 4.3-11
Angle of View from Location 4



4.3I-2 Degradation of the visual character or quality of the project site as a result of tree removal.

Vista Oaks and Highlands Parcel A

The project site for the proposed Vista Oaks project includes approximately 93 acres of total land area. However, approximately 61 acres would be reserved as open space (Parcels A, B and E). The Highlands Parcel A site includes approximately 30 acres with 24.4 acres reserved as open space (Parcels A through D).

The Vista Oaks project site contains 1,989 oak trees 6 inches diameter at breast height (dbh) or larger within the areas available for development. Of these, 291 are recommended for removal by the project arborist as they “are in failing health and/or possess poor structures which may create a hazard in a developed environment, or which may be prone to a premature death.” In addition, the applicant is requesting an Oak Tree Preservation Plan Permit to allow for the removal of approximately 469 trees. Therefore, the proposed project would include the removal of a total of 760 trees. The Oak Tree Preservation Plan Permit would also function to preserve the remainder of the onsite trees (approximately 60 percent of the trees currently existing on the site). The developable portions of the Highlands Parcel A site contain approximately 914 oak trees of 6 inches or greater dbh. Of these, 35 trees are recommended for removal by the project arborist for reasons of poor health or structure. Like the Vista Oaks project, the Highlands Parcel A project also includes as an entitlement an Oak Tree Preservation Plan Permit to allow for removal of as many as 173 oak trees from the Highlands Parcel A site.

The total percentage of trees that would be removed as part of the proposed projects is 33 percent (326 arborist-recommended removals and 642 project removals). The approximately 22 percent of the existing trees requested for removal must be mitigated as required by the Rocklin Oak Tree Preservation Ordinance and per the Southeast Rocklin Circulation Element policies 37 and 38. The approximately 11 percent of trees recommended for removal by the project arborist do not have to be mitigated.

The proposed projects would preserve approximately 67 percent of the existing oak trees, would comply with the City’s Oak Tree Preservation Ordinance requiring the replacement of trees or payment into the Oak Tree Preservation Fund, as indicated in Impact 4.6I-5, would comply with Southeast Rocklin Circulation Element policies 37 and 38, and would also involve the addition of ornamental trees in the landscaping of the residences, substantial adverse affects to the trees as a scenic resource would not occur as a result of project development. Therefore, development of the projects would result in a *less-than-significant* impact. For a discussion of the biological

impacts associated with the removal of trees by the proposed projects, see Section 4.3-3, Biological Resources.

Mitigation Measure(s)

None required.

4.3I-3 Impacts related to a change in the visual resources from adjacent residences.

Vista Oaks and Highlands Parcel A

Although views of the sites could be available to existing residences north of I-80, the structures associated with proposed project would be too distant to be noticeably distinguishable from the surrounding landscape. In addition, views of the project site from the Rustic Hills subdivision would be available only for the houses immediately adjacent to the Vista Oaks and Highlands Parcel A site; other houses within the subdivision would not have views of the project site, due to the topography of the subdivision and the obstruction of the views by the houses adjacent to the site.

However, the approved Highlands subdivision to the south and east of the Vista Oaks and Highlands Parcel A project sites is currently under construction, and the Stone Ridge subdivision to the south of the Phase III portion of the Vista Oaks project site has been developed. Because the land slopes down from the Highlands and Stone Ridge subdivision sites to the proposed project sites, views from the Highlands and Stone Ridge subdivisions looking north and west toward the project sites would consist of the houses and roofs of homes within the proposed projects, as well as the proposed bridge over Secret Ravine Creek. If the proposed Vista Oaks and Highlands Parcel A projects were not constructed, these views could potentially include views of Secret Ravine Creek and the riparian and oak woodland open space areas northwest of the Highlands and Stone Ridge subdivisions.

These natural views of open space areas could potentially be obstructed by the homes and the proposed bridge within the Vista Oaks and Highlands Parcel A project sites, but development within the Vista Oaks and Highlands Parcel A projects would be consistent with the type and intensity of development as surrounding development and would comply with Rocklin General Plan Land Use Element policy 7 and Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation policy 20, which encourage visual compatibility. Road improvements would be designed to preserve the existing surrounding neighborhood character, as well, as required by Southeast Rocklin Circulation Element policy 7. Therefore, impacts related to a degradation of visual resources from adjacent residences would be considered *less-than-significant*.

Mitigation Measure(s)

None required.

4.3I-4 Impacts related to light and glare.

Vista Oaks and Highlands Parcel A

Development of the project site would introduce lighting from residential uses. Night lighting would be readily apparent to neighboring properties that are not accustomed to development on the site, but because the area surrounding the project site is already mostly developed and lit, it is not anticipated that there would be a substantial difference between the existing lighting and the new lighting associated with the development of the project site. In addition, as part of the development review process that would occur, design review objectives would be applied to the project which require that “Lighting standards and fixtures shall be of a design and size compatible with the building and adjacent areas. Lighting shall be restrained in brilliance, and glare into adjacent properties shall be avoided.” In summary, while the level of light would represent a change from the existing condition, it would not introduce lighting unlike that which already exists at other residences and subdivisions in the vicinity. Typical residential lighting would not significantly impact neighboring properties.

I-80 is the only existing roadway in the project vicinity that conveys enough traffic to be impacted by glare resulting from the project. However, as shown in Figures 4.3-4, 4.3-8, and 4.3-11, structures associated with the projects would not be easily visible from I-80. In addition, residential structures would comply with the City of Rocklin development review process and therefore would not produce significant amounts of glare. Therefore, the proposed projects would result in a *less-than-significant* impact regarding additional lights and glare.

Mitigation Measure(s)

None required.

Cumulative Impacts

The analysis of cumulative visual impacts is based on the potential for buildout of the City of Rocklin General Plan to alter the visual character of the City. This section gives full consideration to the development of the City of Rocklin, and acknowledges the physical changes to the existing setting. Cumulative impacts to the existing environment in the project site are determined by the contrast between the site’s visual setting before and after buildout of the Rocklin General Plan. Emphasis has been placed on the transformation of the existing predominant rural setting into a landscape characterized by urban buildout.

4.3I-5 Cumulative impacts to the visual character of the region as a result of conversion of the project site from oak woodland/grassland to residential uses.

Vista Oaks and Highlands Parcel A

The project sites are located within an area in which the majority of land possesses similar visual characteristics. Therefore, the cumulative context of the visual impact of the proposed projects could be considered as within the surrounding area, or, in a larger context, the City as a whole. All of the property within the City in the immediate vicinity of the projects is zoned similar to the project sites. Consequently, in terms of the change to the visual character of the surrounding area, development on the project sites would be typical of what could be developed on the adjacent properties. If developed, the character of the area would change from wooded hillsides to residences interspersed with trees. The surrounding development, in addition to the development on the project sites, would contribute to a significant change in the visual character of the area. The cumulative change to the existing visual character of the area would be considered significant.

On a larger scale, continued growth in the City of Rocklin would result in a long-term change to the aesthetic character of the City. Areas of undeveloped property would change to developed environments. This transition is already evident in many areas of the City. As growth continues, the prevalent visual character would become predominantly urbanized with fewer open space areas. The 1990 City of Rocklin General Plan EIR found that future development, in accordance with the General Plan, would substantially alter viewsheds and vistas and would result in a significant impact on visual resources that could not be mitigated to a less-than-significant level. The proposed projects would contribute to the alteration of views and contribute to a significant cumulative transition of the project vicinity and the City as a whole from undeveloped to developed. Therefore, consistent with the conclusions in the 1990 General Plan EIR, the cumulative impact associated with the proposed projects would be considered *significant*.

Mitigation Measure(s)

Because no feasible mitigation measure is available, this impact would be considered *significant and unavoidable*.

4.3I-6 Cumulative impacts related to light and glare.

Vista Oaks and Highlands Parcel A

As the project sites and region develop, the cumulative level of light and glare will increase. Many areas that are presently undeveloped, such as the project sites and adjacent areas, will support some level of outdoor lighting. The

cumulative effect of the increasing development will be an overall increase in nighttime light levels in the project area and the region. The City of Rocklin 1990 General Plan EIR found that future development in accordance with the General Plan would generate new sources of light and glare and would result in a significant impact on visual resources that could not be mitigated to a less-than-significant level. Because the proposed projects would contribute to the cumulative increase in light and glare a *significant* impact would occur.

Mitigation Measure(s)

Because no feasible mitigation measure is available, this impact would be considered *significant and unavoidable*.